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**Testimony on the *Apportionment in the Balance: A Look into the
Progress of the 2010 Decennial Census***

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the *Apportionment in the Balance: A Look into the Progress of the 2010 Decennial Census*. I am a Senior Research Fellow and Project Manager in The Heritage Foundation's Center for Data Analysis (CDA). I help direct the work of researchers who routinely use a wide variety of data supplied by the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies. I also participate in organizations such as the Association of Public Data Users (APDU) and the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) that deal with federal statistical issues. However, the following testimony reflects my own views and not necessarily those of The Heritage Foundation or any other organization.

Research within The Heritage Foundation's CDA focuses primarily on policy debates at the national level. As a result, I will limit my remarks to examples showing why Census data are important to researchers analyzing federal policies. Before doing so, however, I want to briefly review the importance of producing an accurate and complete decennial census and continuing the American Community Survey (ACS).

The Constitutional framers intended the decennial census to play a key role in ensuring the representative nature of the federal government. This is because apportionment, a vital component of representative government, depends on Census-provided population counts. The United States Constitution was the first in world history to base political apportionment on a national periodic census. The inaugural Congress took the use of census data seriously, as evidenced by some of the first Congressional debates in 1791. Those debates dealt with the formula to be used in determining the number of representatives by state. Initial legislation on apportionment methods led to the first presidential veto by George Washington in 1792.¹ Ultimately, a formula was adopted and, beginning with the 1840 census, data were also used to create Congressional district boundaries in every state.²

Today, the Census Bureau relies on the Master Address File (MAF) and the Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing (TIGER) program to produce an accurate and complete Census. The quality of the Census depends on sufficient funding of these complex systems and on their successful operation both separately and as integrated entities.

But the need to coordinate MAF and TIGER raises serious issues. For example, what happens if an address in the MAF has not yet been assigned a geocode? Will it still be possible to collect and process responses from that address? Also, what checks are in place to ensure that the location of housing units, particularly those with multiple residents, are correctly identified even when the location is different from what a mailing address would indicate?

The ACS, which replaces the Census “long form” in 2010, can be used to help answer such questions and to reveal and resolve other potential problems. Data from the ACS are currently available for most metropolitan areas with populations of 250,000 or more, for all 50 states, for the District of Columbia, and for 203 congressional districts. In the next few years, ACS data will also be available for every county in the U.S. Within five years, ACS data will be available for communities with populations below 20,000. The release of annual ACS-based information for so many different geographic areas will assist local policymakers and data users. Implementing the ACS can also help at the federal level in updating and verifying the systems used to collect decennial census data?

However, these benefits will only be realized if the ACS is adequately funded. They will also only be realized if the Census Bureau works closely with government entities (and other groups) at the state and local level. Census Bureau officials recognize that the reliability of their systems depends on a partnership with local agencies. This is the reason that programs like the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) are vital. For example, local officials may know about areas of new construction before such information is available to Census from the United States Postal Service. In addition, local agencies can supplement information that is based solely on address lists.

A valid address list is critical to the successful implementation of the Census. However, at a human level, the Census is more than a form sent to an address. It is a housing-based survey. In some cases, living arrangements within housing units change from the time addresses were originally assigned. In other cases, several housing units may share the same address, and mail may be distributed using an internal sorting system. Local officials who know about such situations should be communicating with the Census. In addition, the Census Bureau should give local officials advance notice about what information would be beneficial and provide clear instructions about how to make that information available. Advance notice is especially important because it helps local agencies plan ahead and allows them to build the necessary resources into their budgets.

Statistical data provided by the Census Bureau benefit data users at the local, regional, and national levels. I believe it is particularly important that policymakers recognize the value of Census data to nongovernmental analysts who are studying national issues. In the remaining portion of my testimony, I summarize some of the reasons why Census data are so important. I illustrate those reasons with examples of research conducted by analysts in The Heritage Foundation's Center for Data Analysis. The specific research questions, methodologies, and conclusions of these projects are not intended to fully represent the scope of analysis done by policy researchers outside the government. Nevertheless, I think they are typical of ways that many analysts from a variety of political perspectives use Census data.

To begin, Census data help localize national issues to regions that are meaningful for decision makers and ordinary citizens. Traditionally, Census long form data have been the primary—if not the only—source of information about the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of regions that interest policymakers and the public such as Congressional districts and zip codes. As a result, analysts can use Census data to help make the effects of existing federal programs more understandable.

For example, advocates of Social Security reform have highlighted the low rate of return that many retirees receive after years of paying into the retirement system. CDA economists used Congressional district data produced by the Census in combination with data from other sources to estimate Social Security's rate of return for retirees in each state and Congressional district.³ In addition, CDA analysts recently combined Census data reported by zip code with data from the Department of Defense to compare the demographic characteristics of the localities from which military recruits were drawn before and after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.⁴

Census data are also important in statistical evaluations of the effectiveness of federal grants. These data help researchers take into account factors that are not directly related to federal programs but can independently influence policy outcomes. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) emphasized the need to take such data into account when evaluating federal programs such as law enforcement grants. CBO states that "reductions in crime may have as much to do with demographic changes and the strength of the economy as with the efforts of a federal crime-prevention program."⁵ In other words, researchers should control for independent effects when analyzing the outcome of federal initiatives. For this reason, CDA analysts often use Census data in their statistical evaluations of federal programs.⁶ The American Community Survey, by making more local data available on a more frequent basis, will provide additional opportunities for conducting such policy evaluations.

Census data can also be used to analyze proposed changes to federal policies. For example, to examine the potential for a hypothetical Social Security reform plan to produce wealth for low-and-moderate wage earners, CDA Analysts wanted to create representative demographic profiles using a database with a sample large enough to permit very detailed classifications.⁷ They chose to use the first release of the national-level ACS micro-file. This file contains information on the characteristics of housing units and residents, but with all identifying information removed. In contrast to the standard summary tables, which give only cross tabulations based on predefined

classifications, micro-files allow researchers to design tabulations that are most useful for their analysis. Using the ACS micro-file, CDA analysts developed demographic profiles that would otherwise not have been available.

Finally, the on-going ACS will benefit the smaller, but more detailed, special-purpose surveys administered by the Census Bureau. Those surveys include the Current Population Survey, the Consumer Expenditure Survey, the American Housing Survey, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). SIPP has proven to be particularly useful because it collects data for the same set of families over time. Analysts in research organizations and universities routinely use these Census surveys to study issues such as welfare, education and taxes at the national level.⁸

Researchers who use the special purpose surveys will indirectly benefit from the ACS. This is because the smaller surveys are adjusted to be consistent with data from the Census Bureau's ongoing population estimates program. The ACS provides a valuable source of information for updating those estimates and, as a result, for updating the population targets for all the nationwide household surveys conducted by the Census Bureau. In addition, the more detailed surveys draw from a sample base that is similar to the ACS. As a result, ongoing updates to the address lists that are part of the ACS program should help reduce data collection problems (i.e., incorrect or invalid addresses) common to household surveys.

In conclusion, Census data are the backbone of a constitutionally-mandated apportionment process and the MAF, TIGER and LUCA programs are essential to producing an accurate and complete census. Census data are valuable to decision makers and policy analysts at the local and regional levels. In addition, these data, including information about Congressional districts, are frequently used by analysts and policymakers who deal with national issues.

ENDNOTES

¹Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

²*Ibid.*

³Gareth G. Davis and Philippe J. Lacoude, *What Social Security Will Pay: Rates of Return by Congressional District* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2000).

⁴Tim Kane, Ph.D., “Who Bears the Burden? Demographic Characteristics of U.S. Military Recruits Before and After 9/11,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA05–08, November 7, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/cda05-08.cfm.

⁵Congressional Budget Office, *Budget Options*, Appendix A, February 2001, at www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=2731&sequence=33 (April 16, 2001).

⁶See for example David B. Muhlhausen, “Do Community Oriented Policing Services Grants Affect Violent Crime Rates?” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA01–05, May 25, 2001, at www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/CDA01-05.cfm, and “Research Challenges Claims of COPS Effectiveness,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. 02–02, April 5, 2002, at www.heritage.org/Research/Crime/CDA02-02.cfm.

⁷William W. Beach, Alfredo B. Goyburu, Ralph A. Rector, Ph.D., David C. John, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., and Thomas Bingel, “Peace of Mind in Retirement: Making Future Generations Better Off by Fixing Social Security,” Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA04–06, September 10, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/SocialSecurity/CDA04-06.cfm.

⁸For an example of the use of data from the AHS and SIPP by CDA analysts, see Robert E. Rector and Kirk A. Johnson, “Understanding Poverty in America,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1713, January 5, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/bg1713.cfm.

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